# CERTIFICATE

This certificate is issued in support of an application for Patent registration in a country outside New Zealand pursuant to the Patents Act 1953 and the Regulations thereunder.

I hereby certify that annexed is a true copy of the Provisional Specification as filed on 29 April 2002 with an application for Letters Patent number 518624 made by FriendlyConnections.net.

I further certify that pursuant to a claim under Section 24(1) of the Patents Act 1953, a direction was given that the application proceed in the name of RealContacts Limited.

Dated 6 April 2004.

Neville Harris
Commissioner of Patents, Trade Marks and Designs

518624

CHANGE OF NAME OF APPLICANT

**PATENTS FORM NO. 4**

Appln Fee: $50.00

James & Wells ref: 41823/32 TL

## PATENTS ACT 1953
## PROVISIONAL SPECIFICATION

CONNECTION SERVICE

I,      FriendlyConnections.net, a New Zealand citizen of 2 Rhodesvale Terrace, Cashmere, Christchurch, New Zealand

do hereby declare this invention to be described in the following statement:

CONNECTION SERVICE

## TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates generally to a database of records compiled from entities with mutual common links and services based upon these records.

## 5 BACKGROUND ART

Throughout virtually every aspect of human life, economic, social, personal and business decisions are either directly or indirectly affected by the preferences, tastes and actions of our friends, colleagues and acquaintances. This is in contrast to widely accepted economic theory in the fields of, for example, consumer purchases where it

10 is assumed individuals make rational choices based upon the available product or service information. In reality, a recommendation, or an adverse comment from a close trusted acquaintance regarding a specific product will often override other factors in a commercial purchase decision. There are many other areas in which the opinions of respected acquaintances or even organisations can affect the decision

15 making of individuals or organisations.

As one example, the process of finding a personal friend or romantic partner is strongly affected by social connections. The desire to establish fulfilling relationships with other humans, whether romantic or otherwise is one of the strongest human drives and can be the cause of a great deal of anxiety, stress and

20 uncertainty. The very process of establishing relationships with other humans is often fraught with difficulties, compounded by the inherent characteristics of most humans to avoid risk and/or potential rejection.

Many relationships and marriages have traditionally been arranged by families and/or stem from relationships established during school, work, or other situations where

25 humans experience a common bond. Traditional demographics and cultural

characteristics which historically have provided structures and opportunities for like minded individuals to meet are increasingly being replaced or are considered undesirable/unacceptable to a large portion of society.

The increasing urbanisation of populations has resulted with people having lifestyles and schedules which preclude them from establishing successful relationships. Consequently, many people have turned to less traditional means of finding potential mates and a variety of dating services have been provided to meet such needs.

However, many of the factors which inhibit or pose difficulties for individuals to establish relationships with strangers are equally applicable to many such dating services. Even when two people are both desirous of initiating the first steps in a relationship, shyness, fear of rejection, other social pressures or constraints often prevent the parties from establishing contact.

To overcome such difficulties, systems exist whereby people view video tapes/pictures of prospective partners and/or assess common areas of interest such as hobbies, employment and so forth to determine their interest in the potential partner.

The introduction of both parties is only effected if both parties are willing to do so.

Unfortunately, for many people, the visual appearance and/or the stated personal interests are often not sufficient in themselves to overcome the feeling of unease or trepidation of a user from meeting such a potential stranger on a 'blind date'. The initial step itself actually approaching a dating service can prove too embarrassing for many people thus precluding them from being assessed by potentially suitable partners who do make use of the dating service.

Alternative means of matching potential partners include the use of personal advertisements placed in magazines, newspapers and so forth. In recent times, this has been extended to include use of the internet as a means of increasing the potential

pool of suitable partners. In such advertisements, people provide a brief description of their own personality traits and interests and express their preference of such traits in potential respondents. However, such descriptions are often misleading or even untruthful and due to the lack of any independent means of verification available to

5    the enquirer, such advertisements are often treated with a great deal of scepticism by potential users.

Various attempts have been made to enhance such dating services by computerising the recordal and organisation of various human characteristics, seeking to provide enquirers with candidates matching their desired lists of characteristics. None of the

10   systems however overcome the fundamental reluctance of most people to initiate a relationship with a completely unknown individual.

People often become acquainted with their partner due to their environment, i.e. school, college work and so forth and/or due to contact through mutual friends. The most prevalent factor leading to the majority of human relationships is the existence

15   of such a common bond, link or situation/circumstance, either directly or indirectly with the eventual partner.

The very act of establishing friendship with a particular person confers at least a partial affirmation of the person's character, judgement and personality without which the friendship would not have been established in the first place. By proxy

20   therefore, it is widely felt that friends of a friend are also likely to meet the same criteria or standards which formed the basis for the established friendship. The common factor of having a mutual friend provides both potential partners with a degree of reassurance of potential compatibility and like-mindedness which is not discernible through known dating services.

25   Despite the advantages of seeking potential relationships with friends and friends of friends, it is generally impossible for people to attend all the social functions required

to meet all the potentially suitable partners in such an extended network of friends. Furthermore, whilst many friends might be willing or keen to help match potentially suitable partners, they may not want to become duly involved themselves.

Although the act of seeking a romantic relationship may involve contact with an
5    individual's extended network of friends, many non-romantic activities and/or decisions are also influenced by the individual's extended social network.

Contemporary living has confronted many individuals with a daily excess of information. This bewildering array of choices and decisions vie for the individual's attention in almost every aspect of their work, recreation, and social lives. The vast
10   majority of information sources received by most individuals is biased to some extent by commercial interests. Consequently, there is at least the perception the information may be incomplete, misleading or false. The lack of independent objectivity from these information sources leads to scepticism and/or a sense of futility, helplessness, or ambivalence in obtaining worthwhile advice. In contrast, a
15   recommendation by trusted friend of a particular product, service or the like, is likely to be given far greater weighting. Such recommendations will often be accorded far greater significance than any number of expensive, professionally produced, and theoretically compelling advertisements/product recommendations.

An individual may seek a friend's opinion on a variety of issues, aside from
20   commercial purchase issues. The choice of plumbers, dentists, lawyers and other suppliers for example, may be strongly influenced by personal recommendation. Whilst such specific choices may only arise infrequently, friends and acquaintances are often in frequent contact and may cover a wide range of matters, including opinions/recommendations on issues such as books, films, entertainment, restaurants,
25   and many others.

Further applications or activities in which social contacts or recommendations play a

significant role include employment; – for both the employee and the employer, investment opportunities, academic co-operation, finding accommodation/flatmates, arranging social/sporting functions, and so forth. The task of finding a suitable employee amongst a potentially huge number of applicants can be a significant

5 deterrent to many employers. Consequently, many vacancies are only advertised internally or simply filled by recommendations from existing employees. However, such a system is, by its very nature, haphazard and dependant on a non-systematic information distribution system. Conversely, an ideal candidate seeking employment may be completely unaware of a suitable vacancy known to another of his friends, or

10 friends of friends, without systematically pestering his friends on a regular basis. In practice, this type of behaviour would alienate many friends and thus is not typical.

Nevertheless, employers are still confronted by numerous deficiencies in the existing alternatives to finding an employee. As discussed above, advertising via traditional media outlets such as the newspapers, magazines and so forth can produce an

15 excessive number of applicants. The filtering required to shortlist candidates for interview may be based on misleading impressions formed from Curriculum Vitaes, formal qualifications, age, experience and so forth. Furthermore, the cost of the advertising itself together with the processing cost of all the low quality applications can be a significant burden.

20 Recruitment agencies may be employed to pre-filter potential candidates for higher calibre applicants, though this places a further overhead on the employment process.

Internet employment advertising can expose the vacancy to a large number of potential candidates. However, this can also lead to numerous inappropriate responses from a variety of sources. Furthermore, the aforementioned disadvantages

25 of newspaper magazine advertising are also present with this method.

There is thus a need to harness the discriminatory powers of the knowledge, opinions

and recommendations of an individual's extended social network in an efficient and systematic manner without irritating or alienating members of the network.

Potential applications which may benefit from such a system are potentially limitless and the above are given solely by way of example.

5    All references, including any patents or patent applications cited in this specification are hereby incorporated by reference. No admission is made that any reference constitutes prior art. The discussion of the references states what their authors assert, and the applicants reserve the right to challenge the accuracy and pertinency of the cited documents. It will be clearly understood that, although a number of prior art

10    publications are referred to herein, this reference does not constitute an admission that any of these documents form part of the common general knowledge in the art, in New Zealand or in any other country.

It is acknowledged that the term 'comprise' may, under varying jurisdictions, be attributed with either an exclusive or an inclusive meaning. For the purpose of this

15    specification, and unless otherwise noted, the term 'comprise' shall have an inclusive meaning - i.e. that it will be taken to mean an inclusion of not only the listed components it directly references, but also other non-specified components or elements. This rationale will also be used when the term 'comprised' or 'comprising' is used in relation to one or more steps in a method or process.

20    It is an object of the present invention to address the foregoing problems or at least to provide the public with a useful choice.

Further aspects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the ensuing description which is given by way of example only.

**DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION**

25    According to one aspect of the present invention there is provided a searchable

database comprised of data records relating to a plurality of entities, each entity having at least one predetermined factor in common with each other entity.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of providing a searchable database of entities who share a common link with each other

5   including the steps performed by a processor of a data processing and storage system, of:

- receiving input from a first entity including at least one identifying characteristic of said first entity and of one or more chosen entities known to said first entity each having at least one predetermined factor in common with the first entity;

10   - recording said identifying characteristic of each entity to form one or more corresponding entity data records;

- notifying the or each chosen entity of their recordal on said system and requesting input of at least one identifying characteristic of one or more further entities known to the or each said chosen entity each also having at least one said

15   predetermined factors in common with all said entities;

- recording the identifying characteristic of each further entity inputted by the or each said chosen entity to form further corresponding entity data records;

- repeating the above steps of successive notification of further entities and recordal of the identifying characteristic of each further entity chosen as further entity data

20   records;

- providing searchable access to at least part of said database formed from said entity data records

Preferably, said system optionally provides automatic notification or other defined action resulting from information recorded in one or more an entity data records.

As used herein, the term 'entity' or 'entities' refers to any individual, family, organisation, club, society, company, partnership, religion, or the like that exists as a particular and discrete unit.

Preferably, said predetermined common factor includes, but is not limited to, friends; relations; school alumni; employment factors; business colleagues; professional acquaintances; sexual preferences, persuasions, or proclivities; sporting interests; entertainment, artistic, creative or leisure interests; travel interests, commercial, religious, political, theological or ideological belief or opinions; academic, scientific, or engineering disciplines; humanitarian, social, security/military or economic fields and any combination of same.

There are clearly myriad possible common factors between entities. As an illustration, a commercial entity such as a multinational software producer may utilise a database composed of suppliers with a proven track record, e.g. secure credit history, prompt product delivery or low product faults. These chosen entities may be asked for recommendations for further trade related entities, employment vacancies, collaboration request and so forth. A police/security service database may include data on informants with a creditability factor assigned to each according to the assessment of other police/security agencies or individual of same. The present invention is equally applicable as a system in which the entity is a whole organisation, company and the like or to a system in which the entity is the human individuals within such organisations.

Preferably said identifying characteristics includes the entities name and preferably a means of contacting the entity, preferably including an e-mail address; telephone and/or facsimile number; postal address and any combination of same.

Preferably said identifying characteristics also include at least one of said predetermined common factors.

Optionally, said identifying characteristics may include supplementary attributes of said user or chosen entity.

In a romance/friendship related database, the supplementary attribute may include (but are not limited to) the following;

5      -    marital or relationship status (e.g. single, married divorced, separated, de facto, single but uninterested in a relationship at present, and so forth);

       -    physical attributes;

       -    photographs;

       -    a rating, assessment, quantification, qualification, or comment on the or each said

10          common factor from one or more chosen entities by the user.

Optionally said chosen users may prohibit the recordal of any or all details stored or potentially stored in their respective entity user data record from being searchable and/or stored on said database.

The present invention may be used by users to search for entities matching a

15   predetermined profile composed of user defined predetermined common factors, identifying characteristics and/or supplementary attributes. The present invention may also be used to contact and/or convey information to entities matching a said predetermined profile.

Thus, according to a further aspect of the present invention, said database is

20   searchable for entities matching a predetermined profile.

The present invention further provides a means of contacting and/or conveying information to entities matching a said predetermined profile.

A number of core steps are applicable to compiling and using a database for different

applications. These may be illustrated, using friendship as an example of a common factor between entities. A first user inputs the details of all the entities (i.e. their friends) they believe would be willing to be recorded on the database as chosen individuals, and specifies their e-mail address as their identifying characteristic and 'friend' as the common factor between the parties.

Each chosen individual is then notified of their inclusion (or potential inclusion) in the database and optionally notified of the or each common factor liking them to the first user if this is not self evident, e.g. *"you have received an invitation from your friend David to be recorded on a friendship database and he invites you to input details (i.e. e-mail address) of your friends to the data base..."*

The process is then repeated as each friend of the original user agreeing to participate provides the requested identifying characteristic information and their chosen friends are automatically contacted (via e-mail) in the same manner and invited to participate.

Preferably, said searchable access is available only to prescribed users.

According to one aspect of the present invention, said searchable access may be effected according to defined criteria including any said identifying characteristic, common predetermined factors or combination of same.

According to one aspect of the present invention, the said prescribed users provided with searchable access of the database are determined by a defined eligibility criteria.

Preferably, said eligibility criteria includes being a paying subscriber to said system.

In alternative embodiments, the said eligibility criteria definition may be based on any of the above described common factors, identifying characteristic - including said, supplementary attributes or combination of same.

Subscription to the system may constitute a one-off payment, an on-going time-based

payment, or be based on the quantity or nature of database search results.

Thus, in one embodiment, only single individuals (subject to payment of an appropriate fee) would be given optional access to search the database for other eligible individuals within their extended network of friends stored on the database.

5 Thus, for examples, only individuals recorded as being single male would be eligible to search entity data records of single females, but not single males according to one set of eligibility rules, irrespective of whether they were already paying a subscription.

According to one aspect of the present invention, individual users may chose to
10 optionally restrict access to part or all of their stored data in their entity data record to other users with particular identifying characteristics, supplementary attributes and/or common factors.

In this manner, couples in existing relationships who do not want to be contacted by individuals seeking romantic relationships – for example, but who do want to help
15 their potentially complementary friends to meet may simply add the details (i.e. identifying characteristics) of their friends to the system without themselves being locatable in a search by such users.

The couple themselves would not be eligible to conduct their own search for single individuals according to this eligibility criteria.

20 Potential users of such a system can be reassured that they will be included in an essentially private network whereby only others with a common link (e.g. friends, friends of friends, or friends of friends of friends and so forth) will be able to access their personal details if they chose to make them available.

Furthermore, the system does not necessarily require the user to make contact with a
25 prospective date via the system itself. Instead, the system provides a means of

informing the user of the existence of the potentially eligible individual together with the knowledge of a common link, e.g. a shared mutual acquaintance.

Preferably, the system allows said user input and searchable access across a network, preferably the Internet.

5   Alternatively, said network includes an intranet; wide and local area networks; a telephone or pager networks, telephone-based text-messaging or facsimiles; automated mailserver systems; power transmission networks, wireless networks; networks comprised of other telecommunication links: postal or courier services and the like.

10   Whilst embodiments have been discussed above primarily for facilitating the introduction of individuals, a multitude of alternative applications are possible. These include any application where an action may be influenced, or information sought, as a result of knowledge derived from an entity known, either directly, or indirectly to the user.

15   Such applications include, but are not limited to, consumer decisions, buying, selling, trading loaning; finding flatmates/roommates, tenants; organising activities and events, recommendations/opinions including those related to films, plays, books, employment, services, tradesmen, accommodation, restaurants and the like, comparison and explorations of common interests, e.g. horse riding, snowboarding,
20   etc; sharing creative and personnel work, e.g. photos, art-work, literature, music; managing a club or society; locating/supplying/"blacklisting" providers of goods or services; business or technological advice unsuitable for publication; recruitment, job-seeking; estate agents; venture capital; collaborative ventures; referrals; police/security information gathering/informants.

25   The present invention enables information flow not only between immediate acquaintances, but also with the subsequent tiers of entity acquaintances, e.g. friends

of friends, friends of friends of friends and so forth. Furthermore, the core elements of the invention, i.e., a system designed to harness the collective knowledge and/or resources of a number of entities, either directly or indirectly linked to each other by a common factor, may be applied to the diversity of applications listed above without

5    needing to adapt the principles of operations.

Multiple applications may be derived using a database comprised of data from the same entities by utilizing different aspects of the entity interrelations. Moreover, the present invention enables users to record information about themselves and apply selective screening on who else may view the information, and from whom they

10   obtain information.

As previously stated, in the widest form of the present invention there is provided a searchable database comprised of data records relating to a plurality of entities, each entity having at least one predetermined factor in common with each other entity

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a computer-

15   implemented system including a searchable data of entities who share a common link, said system including;

    –    at least one host computer processor connectable to a network,

    –    a database accessible over said network,

    –    a plurality of data input devices connectable to said network,

20   –    wherein said system is capable of receiving input from a first entity including at least one identifying characteristic of said first entity and of one or more chosen entities known to said first entity, each having at least one predetermined factor in common with the first individual;

    –    recording said identifying characteristic of each entity to form one or more

corresponding entity user data records in said database;

– notifying the or each chosen entity of their recordal on said system and requesting input of at least one identifying characteristic of one or more further entities known to the or each said chosen entity each also having at least one said predetermined factors in common with all said entities;

– recording the identifying characteristic of each further entity inputted by the or each said chosen entity to form further corresponding entity data records;

– repeating the above steps of successive notification of further entities and recordal of the identifying characteristic of each further entity chosen as further entity data records;

– providing searchable access to at least part of the entity data records stored in said database.

Searchable access may be restricted to said prescribed individuals/entities

Preferably, said searchable access to at least part of a data record is configurable by the specific entity corresponding to the data record.

According to one aspect of the present invention, said searchable access may be effected according to defined criteria including registration, any said identifying characteristic, common predetermined factors or combination of same.

Preferably, said data input devices are computer terminals, PDAs, mobile phones, laptops, notebooks, any other portable personnel computing device connectable to said network, preferably but not limited to the internet. Said data input devices may provide e-mail, text message, voice or video access to the said host computer or between entities and/or web-browsing access to said host computer via a dedicated web-site interface.

According to one embodiment, entities stored on said database may be periodically provided with indicative information relating to additional new entities with a common factor matching that recorded in the entities user data record, which have been inputted to the system since the entities' last system access and/or said

5      automated periodic update.

Said indicative information may provide a simple numerical indication of new recorded entities, new or altered identifying characteristics or common factors od exiting stored entities, or alternatively may include at least part of the details contained in the respective entity user data records of the new users.

10     According to a further embodiment, a referral chain formed by the sequence of preceding chosen entities sharing a common predetermined factor leading to the eventual choice of a particular entity for inclusion in the database may be recorded in the entity user data record.

According to a still further embodiment, anonymous references regarding a particular

15     entity may be requested of one or more entities identified within the corresponding referral chain relating to said particular individual.

As potential users of this system may be reluctant to disclose some or all of the various common factors, identifying characteristics, supplementary attributes attributes referred to above, a variety of incentives or reassurances may be provided

20     according to the nature of the application. In a relationship/romantic application, a means of indirectly assessing the potential suitability of an individual for a relationship of some kind may be garnered by considering the prospective individual's response or opinion to various neutral or non-threatening issues, such as the user's favourite joke, quote, movie and the like.

25     Thus, in a further aspect of the present invention, an entity is prompted for a response to predetermined questions relating to non-sensitive, matters of opinion on neutral

topics, said responses being stored as part of the entity data record searchable by said selected users.

A consequence of the information distribution systems prevalent throughout the world and the aggressive marketing of products and services is a potential overload of

5　information.　Filtering this information is a fundamental task to permit decisions on the numerous choices confronting a typical individual.　The advice and example provided by our peers/close friends and relatives is a significant filtering technique employed unconsciously by most people.　The present invention harnesses this filtering ability and the collective opinions and knowledge of an entity's extended

10　network of contacts.

Thus, instead of compiling a searchable database purely for a single purpose, e.g. friendship/romantic motives, alternative/additional applications may be layered onto the database.　The additional data obtained from the entity's identifying characteristics may be used to provide users with the means of obtaining information

15　related to any of the above applications from within their own unique extended network of contacts.

The present invention enables a more systematic access to the opinions knowledge, contacts, recommendations and so forth of an extended network of contacts than would otherwise be possible without endlessly disturbing each contact.

20　Applications most suited for implementation of the present invention are characterised by;

- a high reliance on personal networks;

- a significant need/problem to solve;

- a need to access an extended social network but not the general public;

- networks with a large number of people;

- high inter-personnel information flows;

- a large number of people to co-ordinate; and/or

- the network members have insufficient time available to perform all their desired activities, or have insufficient time to communicate with or maintain connections with their personal contacts.

To effect a successful implementation of the present invention to a new application ideally requires the identification of the following factors;

- the different roles of the possible participants (e.g. employer, employee, link, recruiter);

- any social rules that may apply (e.g. notification only if indicated interested in jobs)

- any specific restrictions or special features related to the possible participants; and;

- the different motivations of different roles.

These factors may be readily used to adapt the core functionality of the invention in an open-platform software embodiment. This platform would enable third parties to develop network applications that link into it as well. Although these applications are currently implemented on an Internet and e-mail platform they are not necessarily restricted to same.

It can be thus seen that individual industries may adapt the present invention to their own peculiarities and characteristics. Personal or organisation networks are utilised by each Industry in different ways and to varying degrees. A Share broker and

Venture Capitalists would use personal networks, though in a distinct manner and purpose. Nevertheless, by identifying what the personal networks are used for, and the different roles played by individuals/organisations (i.e. entities) in the industry, the present invention may be adapted to enhance individuals/organisations

5    effectiveness.

Different companies within a given sector of an industry may have specific criteria to define how their employees utilize their networks of friends and colleagues as part of their work. This could be as simple as a particular company template used for e-mail communication with other entities via the said database

10    Using the example of Venture Capital again, personal networks may be used in a variety of tasks – some industry specific, some generic commercial tasks. These may range from senior executive recruitment, seeking specialized co-investment partners, conducting technical due diligence to ordering office supplies. However, in each instance, the present invention may be used to compile, maintain and update their list

15    of contacts.

Furthermore, unlike existing information-gathering systems/techniques, the present invention allows the user to extend their information search (whether it be for a potential olive pressing plant investment company or a new office photocopier supplier) beyond their immediate contacts. Moreover, it also avoids incessantly

20    interrupting all of their contacts whilst ensuring the potentially relevant ones are notified.

A key benefit of the present invention is the ability to layer information requests or dissemination with the user's extended contacts network according to the purpose. If an individual is embarking on a project requiring diverse and/or specialist input, then

25    information requests may be restricted from clearly uninterested contacts. Thus, an

individual organizing a working-party detail at a remote club ski-field for example, would exclude contacting any non-local individuals.

In this instance, the particular criterion used in restricting the database search results is geographical proximity. It may be seen that by adding additional criterion, e.g.

5   posses four wheeled drive transport, physically able, an interest in the outdoor, a relevant craft/trade skill (welding, carpentry, diesel mechanic) may further optimize the search. The available criteria depends on the information stored in the respective entity data records, i.e. the identifying characteristics, predetermined common factors and supplementary attributes.

10   A venture capitalist thinking of investing in a biotechnology project may only notify specific entities within their network. However, the same individual may want include different friends and colleagues in your "romance" and "employment" applications.

In an employment-orientated application, the user may notify different people within

15   their network depending on the nature of the employment. As an example, finding a new sales person will undoubtedly engage a different part of a user's social network compared to seeking a new software database programmer. It may be appropriate to exclude certain individuals from a search, e.g. the superior of a disenchanted employee, where the user knows both individuals.

20   The manner in which a user controls information flow is adaptable to social or commercial change. A user may have close trusted friends who are categorised as able to see all information. Less trusted acquaintances may be accorded certain restrictions or qualifications, e.g., "don't invite Sam Dee to any function without Jane Doe."

25   It can be thus seen that the criteria forming the predetermined profile of an entity sought by the user may include additional 'external' factors from those stored in an

entity data record according to a user defined 'rule'. These external factors may be extremely varied and diverse and include, for example, world or local events, the weather, time, anniversaries/birthdays or whatever factors or issues a user wishes to affect their activities. As an illustration, a user may wish to automatically contact

5    other individuals who snowboard for a backcountry trip, but only if the meteorological office indicates a 'powder day', or if there is no avalanche warnings. Whilst being a snowboarder could be stored as a common factor/identifying characteristic, clearly the snow/weather reports are externally generated and altered dynamically.

10    As previously stated, friends and colleagues often ask each other for recommendations when selecting product and services, e.g., "do you know a good doctor, mechanic etc". These recommendations could be stored in a entity data record as either a common factor, identifying characteristic, or supplementary attribute pertaining to that entity. This enables, for example, a user's friends to see

15    what washing machine they recommended (or did not recommend) and optionally use a hyperlink connection to the manufacturers web-site, for example. Such a mechanism would enable a means of generating revenue from the product manufacturer. A variety of means are possible including a financial, product or service reward to an entity for given number hyperlink accesses made via their

20    recommendation. Alternatively, the manufacturer may directly subsidise the company hosting the searchable database system according to the total number of referrals, whilst the individual system users may receive a proportionally discounted subscription to the system.

Alternatively, the service and/or product providers receive a certain number of

25    recommendations for free after which they are invited to pay a fee to be maintained as an independently searchable on the database. In use for example, a user may know his close friend has a particular brand washing machine. The user may then search to

see who else has that particular machine rather than asking all his contacts on the database what washing machine they posses.

The service/product providers may be contacted informing them which entities contacted them directly via the present invention. This demonstrates to the service/product provider the value of this method for generating business, thus encouraging them to pay to join the service.

It is necessary to provide an incentive for entities to record their recommendations, or opinions of products and services. One method is for service/product providers to provide discounts to entities that recommend them. The present invention monitors all the successful referrals and ensures the appropriate discounts are received by the relevant entities. Revenue is generated from a retaining a percentage of the discounted savings received from the service/product provider.

To facilitate ease of use, service and product providers using the present invention can use customizable emails that they send to happy customers. This e-mail includes a one click link to allow the service or product provider to be added to that persons list of recommendations. If the individual is not a user of the present invention, they are prompted to join.

According to a further aspect, the present invention utilizes an extension of seeking recommendations/advice from friends. An individual/entity may provide the service of business solutions in an analyst/consultant role. Entities using the system would be able specify their particular area of interest and what type of discussions they wish to participate in. Such a capability may also be used to extend the service presently being provided by business mentors and the like.

Participants could include those entities asking questions, answering questions, moderating related discussions, as well as (optionally) the above-described specialists

A question and answer forum (with or without a relevant expert/ oracle) need not be confined to business related matters, and may be directed to any particular are of interest.

The present invention may be expanded from an essentially web-email base system to
5    incorporate a mobile voice connectivity component. In the simplest embodiment, the system of the present invention defines a social network formed by the entities stored in the database. This social network communicates via email and the web, and if voice communication is needed, the system users may simply telephone each other. No direct assistance is needed other than possibly viewing the relevant portion of
10   other entities data record or being informed via a message (email, SMS, or chat, for example) of the other entity's phone number(s).

In a more sophisticated implementation, the present invention can offer automation of the dialing process and value-added services such as conferencing, messaging, and interactive voice response / premium-rate services.

15   Automation of the dialing process can be obtained with a traditional Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) through the use of a web function that allows the user to request that the telephone network make a call to all the desired parties and connect them via a bridge in the network. Automation through Internet telephony would allow the user to directly initiate an Internet telephony call to the desired parties.

20   Telephone conferencing may be used to facilitate combining the features and services of the present invention into a single call. Again, this can be accomplished through a PSTN conference bridge or Internet telephony.

Providing a voice mailbox to which a user could redirect their existing voice mail subscriptions could be used to supplement existing messaging facilities. The
25   advantage of a social-network based messaging system is that it would be able to

separate messages from within the social network from those from outside (assuming caller-id is available).

Interactive-Voice Response and Premium-Rate telephone services could be used to support such social network functions as event management and simple profile

5    management.

Three key platform and application extensions are provided to extend social networks into the mobile environment: Mobile Notification Services, Data Application Services, and Location-Based Services.

Mobile Notification Services allow the user to optionally and selectively receive

10   alerts to their mobile device. These alerts could be in the form of a Short-Message (SMS), Enhanced SMS (EMS), Multi-Media Message (MMS), plain email, a paging message, or other message format.

Data Application Services allow the user(s) to optionally and selectively initiate or receive data communications related to their social network(s).    These

15   communications could be via SMS, EMS, MMS, email, WAP, paging, or other wireless application data format.

Location-Based Services allow users to utilise the benefit of their social network taking account of their physical location. The user's location may be determined by mobile-phone cellsite location, GPS location, manual or menu-driven location

20   selection, or other known methods.

An example service which takes advantage of all the above services is as follows:

User A is at a sports-stadium. He has previously selected on a web site link to the searchable database to be notified by SMS when his direct friends or friends of his friends who match a particular predetermined profile have their mobile devices active

in the same cellsite as him for a minimum of 20 minutes duration. This time restriction eliminates people who are just traveling through the cellsite area.

User A receives an SMS that User B, a friend of his friend User C, is in the same cell-site. The SMS gives a brief biography of User B.

5　User A is interested to communicate with User B, but only after checking with User C about the person. Because it is time-dependent, User A needs to reach User C directly. In a simple implementation, User A will simply call or send a text-message to User C. In a sophisticated implementation, the system will give User A the option to be placed directly into contact via voice or data with User C.

10　User A reaches User C and User C replies positively to User A's interest in contacting User B. User A then responds to the original alert message with that preference. User B then receives a text message asking if User B would like to meet up with User A, a friend of their mutual friend User C. If User B responds positively, both User A and User B are sent messages which give their phone numbers, allowing them to 15　contact each other. In a sophisticated implementation, they would have the option to be placed directly into communication.

In a further embodiment, the present invention provides a 'contact manager' to maintain a user's records of their friends/acquaintances contact details. A user may run an electronic address book in various communication/computing systems, 20　independently of their interaction with the present invention. The accuracy and currency of a user's contact information of friends and colleagues may be enhanced by synchronizing the user's local address book with the details stored on the database of the said system.

The entity's link to their friends/contacts via the network recorded on the said 25　database enables online updating of changes in their contact details each time the use the present invention.

It may be seen that the present invention further provides a tool to visually map social networks. A user may consider themselves as a node and all of their friends as connected nodes. It is also possible to see other nodes and the number of connections that they have, though the names of the people beyond your first connections would not be available. Also viable is the numerous cross links between users easily illustrating how connected you are compared to your other friends and colleagues. It will be seen that the more the present invention is used, the greater its potential effectiveness and commercial worth.

The uptake new entities using the system may be accelerated by incorporating the contact details from an existing contact/messaging service (e.g. e-mail or instant messenger services) and automatically add not just the contacts but also the also the connections between the contacts. As an example, all the email addresses included in the existing contact messaging service may be stored as entity data records or 'nodes' by default. It is the connections between the contacts/users of other services that are of value rather than just the user information by itself.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

Further aspects of the present invention will become apparent from the following description which is given by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1. shows a schematic block diagram of a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 2. shows a first embodiment flow chart implementation of the invention shown in figure 1;

Figure 3. shows a web page forming part of the first preferred embodiment;

Figure 4. shows an e-mail forming part of the first preferred embodiment;

Figure 5. shows a web page forming part of a second preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 6. shows a web page forming part of the second preferred embodiment listing employment search results;

5 Figure 7. shows a web page of an expanded job description of the results shown in figure 6;

Figure 8. shows a user profile update according to the present invention;

Figure 9. shows a web page form for inputting details of vacancy according to said second preferred embodiment; and

10 Figure 10. shows a invitation message template according to the second preferred embodiment.

## BEST MODES FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to a means of harnessing the discriminatory powers of the knowledge, opinions and recommendations of an entities extended
15 network of contacts in an efficient and systematic manner and without irritating or alienating members of the network. There are numerous potential applications for the present invention of which two are described in more detail below by way of illustration only.

Figure 1 shows a schematic block diagram of a system for providing connections
20 between entities, implemented on a computer system (1) according to a first embodiment of the present invention.

The term 'entity' or 'entities' includes any individual, family, organisation, club, society, company, partnership, religion, or the like that exists as a particular and discrete unit. However, though for the sake of clarity and convenience the term

individual or user (as appropriate) is used in the following examples, this does not restrict the present invention to same.

The computer system (1) includes a host computer in the form of an internet web server (2), containing a processor (3) connectable to a network, in particular the internet (4), a database (5) accessible over said network and a plurality of data input devices, represented by user computers (6, 7).

It will be appreciated that by those skilled in the art that the invention is not necessarily limited to use with the internet (4) and that a connection to the host computer/web server (2) may be provided by a propriety network (8) enabling access by via text-messaging telephones (9) for example.

The present invention is particularly suited to implementation as a relationship service to facilitate the introduction of individuals having a common bond or factor with each other. In particular, the present invention is sited to for use as a dating-type service or systems, whereby friends or friends of friends is the said common factor between the individuals.

Existing dating services are hampered by the instinctive reluctance of many users, or potential user's to engage in relationships with individuals of whom they have no prior knowledge. Attempts to overcome this difficulty have been predominately based on systems which record various personal details of the users to provide a basis for filtering potential partners based on the perceived suitability of the recorded personal details.

However, most people's friendships (both platonic and non-platonic) are formed with other individuals with whom they respect, feel comfortable with, whose company they enjoy, with a compatible outlook, sense of humour/beliefs and/or a host of other traits. A friend's friends are thus, widely perceived to be people with a similar outlook/character to the friend in question. Therefore, even if a friend's friend is

unknown to an individual, the existence of the mutual friend between the parties mitigates much of the above-mentioned concerns.

It will be appreciated that the same principals of using an extended network of acquaintances as a means of locating a particular individual can be extended to a

5    plurality of non-romance related areas. As an example, people seeking a particular type of tradesman such as an electrician, confronted by a potentially random choice from listings in a phone book would often be very willing to choose an electrician recommended by a friend. The principle is equally applicable across a huge range of human activities/endeavours and is a fundamental feature of many societies.

10    The use of the system (1) for romantic purposes illustrated in figures 1-4 nevertheless illustrates the operation and characteristics of the present inventions.

Figure 2 show a flow diagram symbolising the implementation of the present invention of the system (1) as shown in figure 1, wherein an individual having an extended network of friends wishes to identify potential relationships from within

15    said extended network.

To initiate the process, the individual accesses the host computer/web server (2) via the internet (4) using a user computer (6) and is connected to a web site (10) interface with the service.

In the initial step 100 the individual enters his/her identifying characteristics (11)

20    which preferably includes a means of contacting the individual, preferably via e-mail and their name. This is recorded by the systems (1) as part of an individual data record (12) unique to each person and stored or updated on the database (5) in step 101.

As discussed above, in the present embodiment, the system (1) is primarily directed

25    towards a single application, i.e., to facilitate romantic relationships between

individuals, and the website (10) and associated correspondence/communication between the users will reflect this single purpose. It is therefore not necessary for the user to specifically record the reason/object for using the service, nor the predetermined common factor (13) or link between the individuals stored in their
5  respective data records (12).

However, in alternative embodiments, the system (1), may be configured to categorise individuals by predetermined common factors other than just friendship. These factors may encompass the full gamut of human interactions with each other and may include family relations; business colleagues; professional acquaintances;
10  sexual preferences, persuasions, or proclivities; sporting or leisure interests; religious, political, theological or ideological beliefs; academic, scientific, or engineering disciplines; humanitarian, social or economic fields and any combination of same.

Such predetermined common factors may be recorded in step 101 as part of the individuals data records (12) on the database (5). However, again for the sake of
15  clarity, the present embodiment is described with a common factor (13) between the individuals of friendship.

After entering the user's identifying characteristic (11), the user selects one or more chosen individuals from their network of friends in step 102. Each said chosen friend is then notified by an e-mail as shown in the exemplary email illustration represented
20  in Figure 3. The e-mail notification (14) effected in step 103, conveys to the recipient a brief outline of the service (15) together with a request (16) for their participation (step 104).

No individual data records (12) are recorded/stored for recipients choosing not to participate (step 105) or simply wishing to help their friends without their own details
25  being accessible to others. Individuals willing to participate are invited (17) to enter details of their own friends in a repetition of step 102. The details of the chosen

friends entered, i.e., the identifying characteristic (11) in this embodiment are the friend's e-mail address and name. The individuals chosen for contact are notified by e-mail in a repetition of step 103.

The whole process (as described above in steps 102-105) of notifying friends, recording the details of willing participants as individual user data records, and contacting the chosen friend's friends and so forth is successively repeated in this manner until the full extended network of friends has been contacted.

Within a typical extended network of friends, there may be single individuals seeking relationships, single individuals not actively seeking a relationship, couples, separated couples, and so forth. Prescribed individuals meeting certain eligibility criteria are invited to register to obtain searchable access of the database (5).

In the present embodiment (and as shown in Figure 2), the said eligibility criteria for registration is whether that the individual is single (step 106).

Individuals meeting this criteria, i.e., they are single (automatically detected by said processor (3) reading said data records (12) in the database (5)) are sent an e-mail notification (18) (as shown in figure 4) in step 107 to invite them to register for searchable access of the database (5). If user is recorded as not being single in the individual's data record (12), no invitation for registration is sent – step 108.

In the example represented in figure 4, the e-mail (18) includes the option (19) of restricting the information in their own individual data record to be available to just 'friends of friends' or 'friends of friends of friends'. It also permits the user to register the type of relationship they are interested in via a selection menu (20).

It will be apparent to one skilled in the art that many variants of the described embodiment are possible without departing from the scope of the invention.

In alternative embodiment (not shown), any of the users may input a variety of supplementary personal attributes/information as part of the identifying characteristics (11) including their including marital or relationship status (e.g. single, married divorced, separated, de facto, single but uninterested in a relationship at

5 present, and so forth); physical attributes; photographs.

Furthermore, close friends (as opposed to friends of friends) may be offered a means of recording a rating, assessment, quantification, qualification, or comment regarding the details stored in the relevant individual data record (12). This can provide a means of limiting any excessive boasting/hyperbole or reticence/down-playing by an

10 individual and thus provide a more accurate description.

It should understood that the system (1) does not specifically require the users to contact each other via the internet, rather, it provides the information required (e.g. a common friend) to contact an individual with whom the inquirer is known to share a common link.

15 Even though many users may find e-mail to be a convenient means of contact, there is nothing precluding the use of the telephone, letter writing, personal contact or any of the 'conventional' means already available to the public. Such contact details may simply be recorded as part of the data (12) records and made searchable to prescribed users.

20 The invention possesses several security features not shared by existing 'dating-services'. Firstly, only individuals sharing a common link (e.g. friendship) are able to obtain access to another individual's personal details, i.e. their data record (12). No information is disclosed to the 'outside world'. This greatly reduces the concern and likelihood of approaches from 'crank individuals', whether perceived or actual.

25 Secondly, the system does not rely on the users inputting large amounts of personal and potentially private information into a database over which they have no access

control. Many users may feel less threatened by recording the minimal information needed on the database (5), particularly with the reassurance that the information is only viewable by friends or friends of friends (or friends of friends of friends).

Further features or embellishments to the basic system include cross checking the details of new individuals proposed for inclusion on the database to see if they are already present. This prevents people receiving unwanted duplicate e-mail requests (14) to join the service.

Eligible individuals, i.e. single friends meeting a particular search criteria may be listed with the along with the path of referring friends to provides a sense of context and background information. User can be provided with the option of whether they want their referring friends to be 'attached' to them in this manner.

Registered users may be notified periodically about the number of new eligible individuals included in the service since they last used the service and/or we last notified.

Users may customise the format of the e-mail notifications (14) to suit their own tastes. As will be seen in the outline of the service (15) shown in figure 3, there are two drop-down boxes to enable the user to customise the characterising description of the service and the salutation with the minimum of effort.

If a user dislikes a particular individual within an extended network of friends, they may deny to access of their individual data details during any search of the database (5) conducted by said particular individual (or not accept a link to them in the database (5) at all).

Instead of accessing the service via the internet (4), any proprietary network could be employed such as an intranet, wide and local area networks; a telephone or pager networks, telephone-based text-messaging or facsimiles; automated mailserver

systems; power transmission networks, wireless networks; networks comprised of other telecommunication links: postal or courier services and the like.

The now widespread text-based phone-messaging feature of telephones, particularly mobile telephones (9) can be utilised as a convenient and attractive means of

5    accessing the service through a proprietary network (8).

Instead of each user instantaneously sending their e-mail requests (14) to the friends chosen for possible inclusion in the service individuals in 'real-time', these may be grouped together so that an individual receives a single notification indicating all the friends who have recommended them.

10    A further variant of this feature is to periodically notify a user of all the other individuals who have registered and who want to refer to the user as their friend.

A 'referral chain' of individuals connecting two people provides a means for both parties to inquire about each other through any of the parties in the referral chain. This provides a means of obtaining further information about an individual before

15    committing to a date/meeting. This essentially mimics the age-old social mechanism whereby friends are used as intermediates or envoys to discover details of potential mates/partners.

A means of extracting information from an individual's on which character assessments may be made is possible by means of obtaining response from said

20    individual to a range of questions on neutral, mainstream, non-threatening or non-sensitive issues. Such questions could relate to the user's favourite joke, quote, movie and the like. Said responses may be stored as part of the individual user data record and may be searchable by said selected users. This avoids the understandable reluctance of many potential users to divulge personal, private and/or physical details

25    to the scrutiny of third parties

The entry of an expanded list of identifying characteristics/common factors (11, 13) as referred to above can enable the service users to contact other people having a common link for non-romantic purposes. This may range from golfers seeking like-minded playing partners to lawyers seeking reliable associates in overseas jurisdictions.

The recommendation of a friend or colleague or even indirectly by someone (even if not a direct acquaintance) whose judgement is respected can greatly influence people's action and choices. The choice of say, a builder, dentist or mechanic for example may be influence by acquired personal experiences or by reputation, and/or recommendation. The latter option is often given preference due to the greater potential impartiality and its ability to draw on a wider pool of personal experiences.

The present invention is readily adaptable to such relationships, and in fact, may be utilised in facilitating interaction between parties in almost any sphere of human activity, provided the parties share a common link (either directly or indirectly) which is respected by the said parties.

As discussed, industry specific applications may be formed from the core features set of features of the present invention.

Table 1 below contains an exemplary list of possible applications.

Table 1.

| Application | Problem solved | Roles | Application-specific factors |
|---|---|---|---|
| Employment | Finding high quality people for jobs at a low cost | Employer, Employee, link, Seeker/candidate, Recruiter | Best employees and or jobs are often found through the grey job market via friends and colleagues |
| Romance | Finding a partner | Single, Link | The majority of people find their partner via common friends and colleagues |
| Flatmate finder | Finding a trustworthy and interesting person to live with | existing flatmates, New flatmates, Link | It is better to choose someone you patriotically know compared to an advertisement in the paper where you do not know the person at all. |
| Investment | Finding investors with | Offerer, | A large proportion of private |

| opportunities | skill and desire to invest in particular areas | Investor, Consultant, Link | equity is placed via personal networks and would benefit from a more systematic system. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Recommendation engine for movies, books, plays etc | Finding good entertainment | Reviewer, Link, Entertainment seeker | Friends often ask, "have you seen any good movies, read any good books" and this makes it easy to see what people think is interesting and worthwhile. |
| Service and product recommendation engine | Way to find good product and services to buy | Service/product provider, consumers, link | See above section |
| Event manager | Way for people to organize gathering and find people to make up numbers | Organizer, participant, link, person with interests | When organizing sports teams etc it is time consuming to call around a see if everyone can make it. |
| Academic collaboration | Way to keep up to date in a research field | Academics, links | There are numerous ways academics use networks to collaborate on performing, writing up and presenting research. |
| Contact manager | Keeping your contact information of friends and colleagues up to date | Friends and colleagues | This application could sync the user's local address book with an online one. The invention enables on-line updates of the user's friends/acquaintances contact details and update them on their local computer by synchronizing the address books. |
| Business problem solving | Way to find information from business colleagues and share information | Question askers, question answerers, moderators | When you have a specific problem you often ask colleagues for the answer or who to go to for the answer. With this service you can sign up to different areas of interest and choose what discussions you want to participate in based on your network of colleagues. |

In a second embodiment, an employment-related application is shown, as illustrated in figures 5-10. The employment application may operate as a stand-alone application or, as shown in the drawings, be layered onto other applications such as the romance/friendship application described above using the same system (1). The basis for the application is founded on the same principles and core functions, i.e. using the knowledge, experience, contacts, opinions, or recommendations of an entity's extended network of contacts to enhance the effectiveness of their activity of interest.

As discussed earlier, finding employment, or the right applicant for a vacancy can be a frustrating and often futile task. The searchable database system (1) (as shown in figure 1) of the present invention maybe utilised to address these difficulties for either task as follows.

5    In this embodiment, corresponding elements of system (1) are like numbered. The system is again described with reference to an Internet (4) based platform, though again, the invention need not necessarily be so restricted. The database (5) may be populated in the same manner as described in the first embodiment with data records (12) relating to entities known (directly or indirectly) to each other. Once compiled,

10   such a database (5) may be effectively reused for quite distinct purposes.

The various common factors (13) and/or identifying characteristics (11) (including any supplementary attributes) entered into the individual data records (12) provide a means to discriminate information flow between relevant employment entities/individuals. A user accessing the website (10) to seek potential job vacancies

15   and selecting an appropriate hyperlink from the home page will be brought to the web page (21) shown in figure 5.

In addition to pursuing a search for employment vacancies, the user is offered choices on managing their own personnel network (referred to in the illustrations as the user's personnel network formed (in the figure 5) from their friends and friends of friends.

20   In this embodiment, the common factor (13) is friendship, though clearly other common factors (13) may be used. A numerical status indicator (22) in the upper right of the page (21) keeps the user informed of the total number of contacts in their personnel network, also indicating the potential number of recipients of a search they may conduct.

25   A further restricted list of options (22) prompts the user to edit their profile, i.e. their data record (12), add additional friends to the system (1), alter their password and/or

their contact details (one of their identifying characteristics (11)). Under a further "Jobs :Options" (23) list of options, the user may select from the following job related options;

- Managing Job postings;

5 - Searching Jobs;

- Manage saved searches/alerts;

- Edit User job Preferences; and

- Change User Status.

Access to the expanded list of all the available user options may be accesses via links 10 entitled "Jobs: Options" (23), "Managing My Personnel Account" (24) and/or "My Network of Friends" (25) links.

However, assuming for convenience that a user wishes to search for a job and selects the relevant option, they are taken to the 'Job Search' web page (26) shown in Figure 6.

15 At the job search-criteria web page (26), the user is able to specify (via selectable options (27)) search restriction criteria such as job category, geographical region and one or more identifying characteristic (11)/common factor (13). In the embodiment shown, the identifying characteristic (11)/common factor (13) is the link between the user and the potential recipient, e.g. friend of a friend and/or a friend of a friend of a 20 friend. Searches may be saved for future use, and previous searches recalled using their respective icons (27, 28). The example shown in figure 6, the web page (26) is showing a result summary (30) of a search conducted on the criteria specified in above options (26).

In this example, a single job vacancy has been found by the search. The summary of the job details indicates the vacancy was posted onto the system (1) by "Julian, a friend of John (a friend known to the user Jane), together with basic job details. If these sufficiently interest the user, the full vacancy details may be obtained by

5    following the job title hyperlink (31) that leads to the web page (32) shown in figure 7.

In addition to giving an expanded description (33) of the job vacancy, the web page (32) also provides an identifying characteristic (11) of the individual posting the vacancy, i.e., Julian's e-mail address (33). Also given are the connection(s) (35)

10    between the user and Julian. The user thus has the choice of contacting Julian, the vacancy poster, one of their mutual friends, as identified by the connections (35), or enquire directly to the company advertising the vacancy via a dedicated link (36).

The vacancy poster Julian may optionally withheld his e-mail address (34) from being visible to some or all of job seekers.

15    It will be appreciated that the above search procedure may be easily adapted to other applications in addition to those of romance or employment illustrated.

The various entities/individual users of the system (1) may specify their interest in particular types of employment (as an identifying characteristic/common factor (11, 13)) by updating their profile i.e., their entity data record (12) accordingly. This

20    information may be used by another user as a criteria for inclusion in vacancy notifications.

Figure 8., shows a web page (37) used for updating a user's profile (12). As this embodiment particularly refers specifically to employment, the primary selection available to the user is a selection of vacancy types they may be interested in via a

25    drop-down box (38). Clearly, alternative or additional information may also be recorded in further embodiments.

In the case of an individual or company wishing to circulate a vacancy amongst their network of contacts, figure 9 shows a further web page (39) for defining the vacancy details. Again, the user is able to restrict the circulation of the vacancy to friends, friends of friends, or everyone via appropriate check-boxes (40). The user is

5    provided with various optional and required inputs, including a job title/reference (41), job description (42), contact e-mail address (43), geographical location of vacancy (44), generic vacancy category (45), vacancy type (e.g. casual, permanent) (46), expected hours of employment (47), vacancy level (48), and maximum, minimum and annual pay (49).

10    The primary mechanism for new users to join the system (1) is through contact with existing members. This may be performed as part of the act of seeking a vacancy, seeking an employee, or as a link individual who facilitates contact between the relevant parties. Figure 10 shows a further web page enabling a user to send an appropriate invitation to their friends/colleagues/acquaintances, with a customizable

15    text message. In figure 10, the proposed text (51) is worded to indicate the user has some vacancies that need filing. However, the text may be replaced, edited within the user's own e-mail editing program if desired by selecting an appropriate link (52), or pasted directly into an e-mail or ICQ/Instant messenger service if desired via a further link (53).

20    Aspects of the present invention have been described by way of example only and it should be appreciated that modifications and additions may be made thereto without departing from the scope thereof.

25

FriendlyConnections.net
By its Attorneys

JAMES & WELLS

**Fig. 1**

**Fig. 2**

Enter personal ID details — 100

User chooses friends to contact — 102

Notifies chosen friends by e-mail — 103

Do friends want to participate — 104

No → No ID details stored — 105

Yes

Store ID details on database — 101

Is individual single? — 106

Yes → Offer registration for searchable access to database — 107

No → No registration possible for database searching — 108
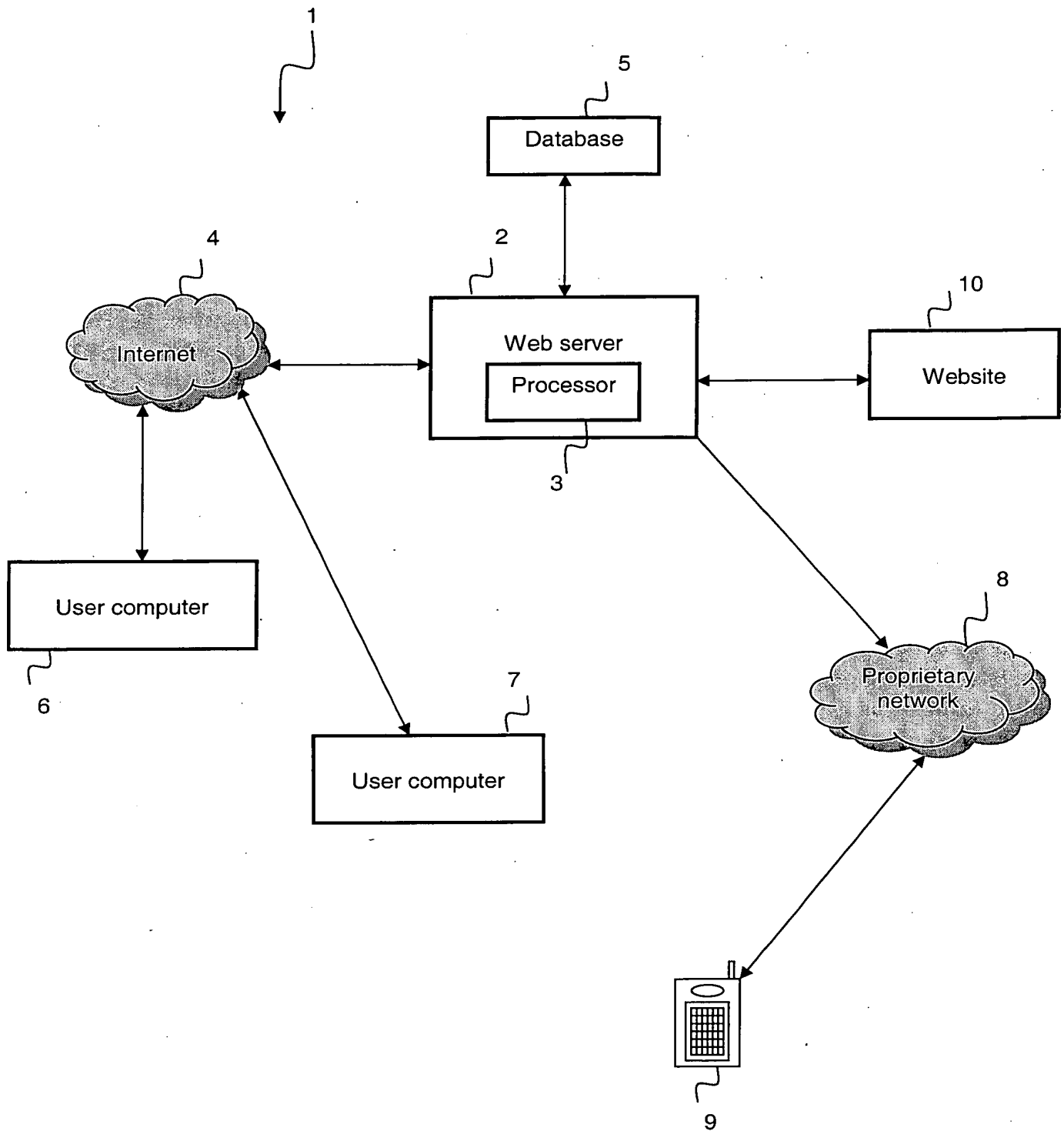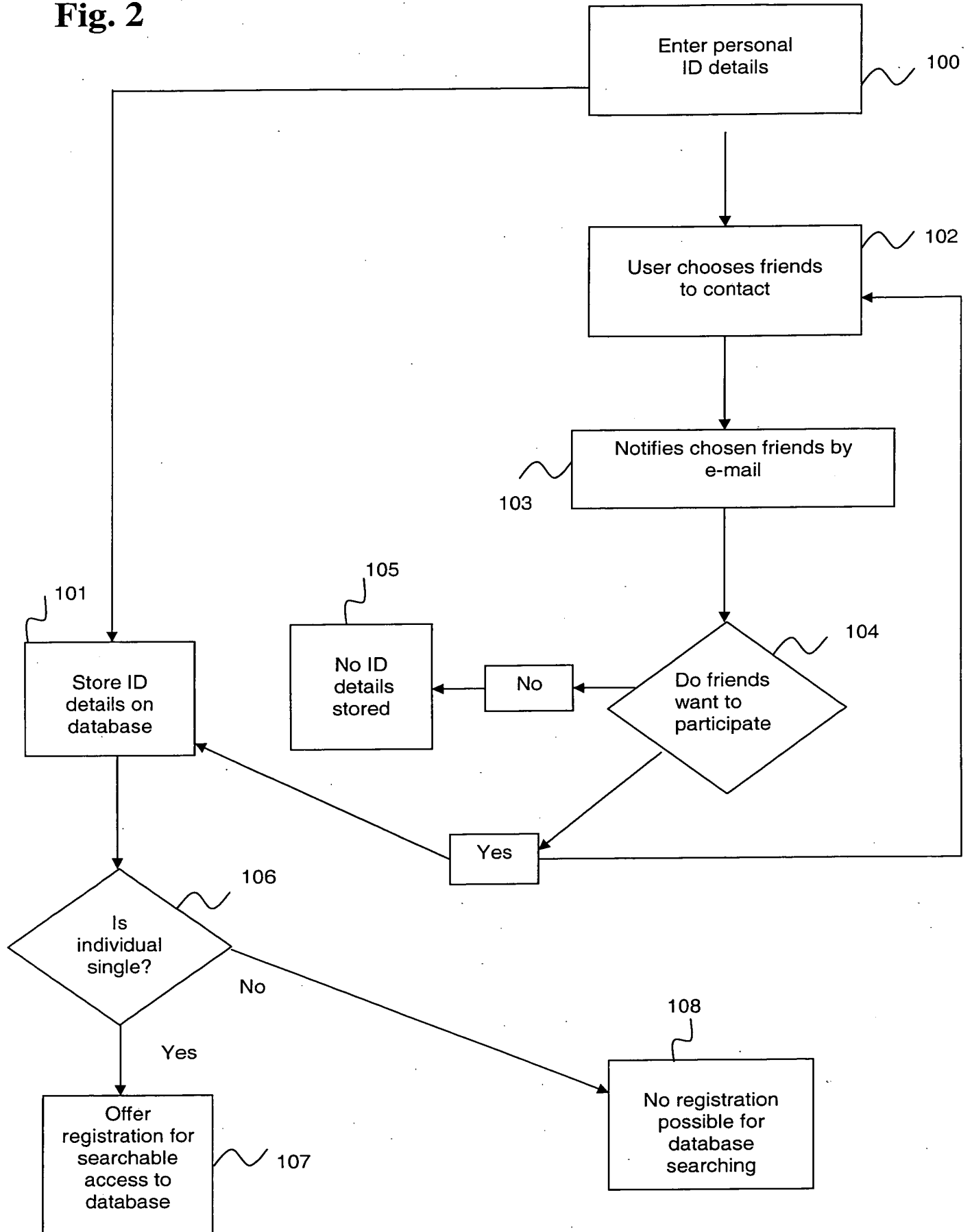
# Help Your Friends

Your Details

| First Name | Your email address |
|---|---|
|  |  |

To help your friends all you have to do is enter in the email addresses of your friends below and the following email will be sent to them. You can modify the letter with the drop down menus to make it more appropriate for you and your friends.

16

| Subject | *Your Name* requesting a little help from my friends for my friends |
|---|---|

Hi *Friend's Name*,
This is [ a cool ▼ ] way that you can help your single friends meet other single people in our network of friends. All you have to do click on the link below and follow the easy instructions. You can help your friends (and me) without having to register yourself and no information is ever made available to the general public. The whole process only takes about five minutes.
Click to help your friends
Thanks for helping out
[ Regards ▼ ]

15

Sign the letter

14

List of people to send it to

| First Name | Email address |
|---|---|
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

[ Send Emails ]

17

**Notes**
- We will only send this one email to your friends. If they do not click on the link and choose to participate we will delete their email address from our records.
- The reason we send this email via a form on a webpage is so that if another common friend has already given us their name we do not need to send them another email hence it reduces email clutter.

**Fig. 3**

## Start Using the Service

Using this service is a simple four step process

1. Register for the service
2. Add additional information about yourself to your profile (optional)
3. Invite your friends to join your network (optional)
4. Search your network of friends

## Registering for this service

To use FriendlyConnection.net all you have to do is register by filling out the simple form below (if you have been referred by an email from a friend then most of this form should already be filled out for you). When you have done this you will able to search your network of friends for single people and single people in your network will be able to find you.

Click here for an example of the information you will be able to search through when you register
If you want to use this service to find single people in your network of friends then simply follow this easy registration process

| Who would you like to be able to see the information you provide here? Friends of Friends Friends of friends of friends | None of the information you enter will be made available to people other than those that you specify here. It will never made available to the general public |
|---|---|

| I am a | Woman Man | interested in meeting a | Woman Man |
|---|---|---|---|

| My Firstname is: | |
|---|---|
| My Lastname is: | [Optional] |
| My preferred email address is: | |
| please confirm your email address: | |
| | Register |

19

20

18

Fig. 4

jane[jane@janedoe.com] Status: Active

Friends: 1 Friends of Friends: 6 My Entire Network: 14

22

## Things You Should Do Next

- You still need to Edit your Profile to select the Job Categories you are interested in

- You still need to Add some Friends to Your Network

- You can change your Password to something you can easily remember:
  Do you want to change it now? Yes / No

- If you have more than one email address (eg: work and personal) then you should add your additional addresses to your Profile as Email Aliases

## Full Set of Options

\* Jobs : Options
  Manage Job Postings
  Search Jobs
  Manage Saved Searches/Alerts
  Edit My Job Preferences
  Change My Status (Your status is: Active)

23

\* Manage Personal Account

24

My Network of Friends \*
Add Friends to My Network
Find Friends who are Already Members
Manage My Friends
Show My Contact History
Show Blocked and Hidden People
Show My Favorites

25

Edit My Preferences

\* Tips on Getting the most from your account \*

\* Contact Support

Logout \*

Manage Account | My Options | Manage Network | Generate Invite | Search Jobs | Manage Searches/Alerts | Manage Jobs | How It Works | About Us | LogOut

Pricing | Privacy Policy | Contact Us | Terms and Conditions

21

Fig 5.

22

## Search My Network for Jobs

**Full Search Mode**

Which is in Your:: ☐ Friends of Friends or ☒ Friends of Friends of Friends

Country : ☒ in New-Zealand or ☐ Any Country (region setting will be ignored)

Region : | Canterbury ▾ | Location : | Christchurch |

27

Job Category: | Arts, Entertainment, and Media ▾ |

29

| Monthly Chk ▾ | | Load Search |
| | Save Search |

28

## RESULTS

1 Job Found

Page 1 of 1

Job 1

31

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Permanent , Full time (30hrs+)
Graphic Designers & Co.
Julian, a friend of friend of John
05 Mar 02

30

1 Job Found

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Fig 6.

**Details for Position: Graphic Designer**

Job Title:
Graphic Designer     [Applications Close: **05 Mar 02**]

Company:
Graphic Designers & Co.

Direct enquiries to:          — 34
julian@ISP.com

Job Location:
Christchurch, Canterbury, New-Zealand

The Categories the Job is applicable to:
- Arts, Entertainment, and Media
- Internet/E-Commerce

The Type and Hours of the Position are:            33
Permanent , Full time (30hrs+)

Remuneration Details (if provided):
(NZD)$20 - $40, Hourly Pay

Job Description:

5-7 years relevant experience desirable.

**Job Posted by: Julian. How Julian is connected to you:**
- **Your friend John (john@ISP.com) knows Henry who knows Julian**          35
- **Your friend John (John@ISP.com) knows Fred who knows Julian**

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Enquire about this Job            — 36

Close Window

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Fig 7.

## Update Your Profile                    22

**Your profile is listed below. The first section includes your Required Fields and the second section contains your Optional Fields.**

**Required Fields**
This information is the minimum required by the system

Who would you like to be able to see your details when they search their Network of Friends?

☐    Friends of Friends

☑    Friends of friends of friends

My First name is:

| Jane |

My Last name is:

| |[Optional]

My preferred email address is:
**jane@janedoe.com**   [Change Your Email Address]

**Optional Fields**
You only need to fill in the fields you feel comfortable with. You can change this info at any time

The Country I live in is:
**New-Zealand**   [Change your Country]

The Region I live in is:

| Canterbury ▼ |[recommended]

The City/Town that I live in/near is:

| Christchurch |[recommended]

The Categories of Job I am interested in are: [required]

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| Accounting/Auditing ▲ |
| Administrative and Support Services |
| Advertising/Marketing/Public Relations |
| Agriculture, Forestry, & Fishing |
| Architectural Services |
| Arts, Entertainment, and Media |
| **Banking** |
| Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical |
| Community, Social Services, and Nonprofit |
| Computers, Hardware ▼ |

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Fig 8.

## Adding New Job Posting
Fill out the form below to Post a Job    22

Employer: [_____ ▼]

Closing Date: [ 26 May 02 ]

Who would you like to be able to see this Job Posting when they search their extended Network of Friends?

☐ Friends of Friends

☑ Friends of Friend of Friends   } 40

☐ Everybody (I want this job to be publicly visible)

Job Title: [_____] } 41

Job Reference ID: [_____]

Job Description: [required]

[_____ ▲▼ ] — 42

Contact Email Address: [_____] — 43

The Country the job is in: [ New -Zealand ▼ ] [required] }

The Region the job is in: [ Canterbury ▼ ] [required]    } 44

The City/Town the job is in: [ Christchurch ] [required] }

The Categories the Job is applicable to: [required]
[ Accounting/Auditing ▲
  Administrative and Support Services
  Advertising/Marketing/Public Relations ▼ ] — 45

The Type of Position is: [ Work Experience ▼ ] [required] — 46

The Hours of the Position is: [ Full time (30hrs+) ▼ ] [required] — 47

Job Level: [ Entry Level ▼ ] [required] — 48

Salary Information:
Minimum [_____] Maximum [_____] [ NZ Dollar ▼ ][ Annual Pay ▼ ] — 49

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Fig 9.

Jane[jane@janedoe.com] **Status:** Link

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## Invite Friends to Join My Network

Simply send the message below to as many of your friends as you like. If they choose to follow the link and sign up they will become part of your network. The link is the only part of the message you must include but it is recommended that you include the last note as well.

**You can send them the message by:** — 52
**\*** **Clicking here to open the message in your email program** ⎯⎯⟋
**\*** Copying and pasting the text into an email message or ICQ/Instant Messenger (**Copy Message**) ⎯⟋ 53

Hi,

We have a couple of positions that we are looking to fill at the moment in the following areas .... If you happen to know of anyone that might be interested that would be appreciated.

There is a new service that allows me to post jobs to my network of friends and colleagues without interrupting them all the time. It make the whole process of finding good quality people much easier. To join just click on the link below and follow the instructions.
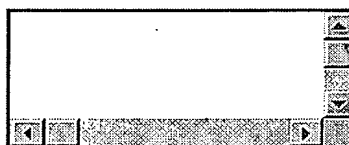http://friendlyconnections.net/home.asp?i=3738714

You help is very much appreciated.

Cheers, Grant

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[select all]

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**\***
**If you know that a friend is already using this service**
**then you can just search for them by email address**
**\***

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Fig 10.